be secret, or on the square, if there is no objection to making it public. The chief and his men sit on one side, the visitor on the other; if he wishes to conform strictly to all the laws of etiquette, he will first explain the matter to his own Agent General, who will communicate with the chief's special counsellor, repeating the words of the visitor, sentence by sentence; the counsellor will, in his turn, communicate with the chief, again telling him the whole story, as if he had not heard a word of it before. The affair will thus have passed through three hands and the answer should, in due formality, be given through the same channels. These precautions, which seem eminently superfluous, even somewhat ridiculous, to a person unacquainted with Bantu etiquette, evidently proceed from the fact that there are no stenographers or secretaries to furnish any written record of the proceedings, so that it is necessary to have as many witnesses as possible and that these should thoroughly understand the matter under consideration.

II. *Judicial Cases.*

1) Sense of justice.

As has often been remarked, the Bantus possess a strong sense of justice. They believe in social order and in the observance of the laws and, though these laws are not written, they are universal and perfectly well known. The law is the custom, that which has always been done. The old men, the counsellors and more particularly the counsellors of the capital, are those who can speak authoritatively. But everybody is welcome in the *hubo*, where matters are discussed; even a stranger can take part in the discussion. "No one is excluded, if he speaks rightly; only fools, those who do not know anything" (Mankhelu).

This participation in the discussions of the hubo has developed the sense of law to a wonderful extent amongst the Bantus. They are all born advocates and judges, and take a great interest in this business! No wonder therefore that the Thonga vocabulary

where carpentering and waggon building are scientifically taught, the results are very satisfactory, and I myself saw at Lovedale a splendid American desk which had been made entirely by a Native, and was as perfect as if it had been manufactured by a European craftsman. So the industrial stagnation of the South African tribes must not be put down to an innate incapacity for progress. I think we must look elsewhere for its causes, and, without claiming to exhaust the question, I will proceed to enumerate the factors, which, to my mind, explain the exceedingly slow development of these tribes.

Their *political system, social and religious*, is one of the chief causes of this state of things. The deceased chiefs are the gods of the nation. Whatever they did should be done now ; their lives are the supreme examples to be followed ; the traditions handed down by their ancestors are the only religious and moral guides which these people possess. Customs which have come down from prehistoric times are law. No one would think of abandoning them. To do otherwise than others do, *psa yila*, is forbidden. It would be a denial of the divine authority of the ancestors, and a danger to the tribe. This principle is most strictly maintained in such tribes as are the freest from foreign admixture and the least exposed to outside influences. In the Khosen country, for example, when an evangelist trained in Spelonken, Yosefa, wanted to build a square house, he was prevented from doing so. It was against the law. How could he expect to live in a hut of a different shape from those his forefathers had inhabited? Had there been no Whites in the country, Yosefa would have found it impossible to build a house to his liking! This is a typical case of the immobility of Native industry (1).

But in advancing as a reason for this immobility the all-powerful sway of custom, supported and maintained by the national authorities, we have only pushed the difficulty further back. How has it been possible to maintain such a system of oppression? How is it that no stronger minded individuals have arisen to throw off this yoke and gain liberty of action, stirring up the tribe, in spite of itself, from the lethargy in which it is plunged, like an organism with its blood congealed !

(1) The lack of imagination in these races seems specially noticeable in mechanics, and it has been remarked that South African Natives have not yet invented a single machine. This may be true. However, I heard it attested by a Johannesburg technician that the Thongas have a real aptitude for running engines and a real bent for mechanics. As not one of them has ever studied advanced mathematics, no wonder they have not invented new machines.

Amongst our own races, men of genius, great thinkers, have, from the earliest times, been able to impress their new ideas upon the masses, and lead them eventually, however recalcitrant, upon the march of progress. We shall have to content ourselves with two considerations which may help to solve the problem. 176 178 183

Our civilisation is the result of a combination of millions of minds and hundreds of peoples. The lake-dweller, of the stone-age, was not much more developed than the present-day Black of South Africa: in some respects he was less so. But he inhabited Europe, and, to the South of that Continent, stretches an inland sea, the Mediterranean, which spreads out its many arms in gulfs and bays reaching to the very heart of the countries on its shores, and thus facilitates access between nation and nation. Every new discovery by one soon became the property of its neighbour. Rome inherited from Greece, and Greece from Egypt and Abyssinia, and these international relations, favoured by the geographical conditions of the Old World, explain the development, *the arithmetical progression* shall we call it, of our Indo-European civilisation: In Africa, nothing of the sort exists. Few, if any, gulfs or bays are to be found in this Continent, whose coasts are hopelessly unbroken and inhospitable. Many a long stretch of river, otherwise navigable, is closed to navigation by impassable cataracts. Deserts of burning sand separate the tribes from one another, and sometimes they are isolated by veritable ramparts of lofty mountains. Communication is almost impossible, and the Black tribe, left to its own resources, amidst natural surroundings of an enervating description, remains stationary and content with the elementary industry to which it has attained. *Outside influence is wanting* to stimulate the intellectual energy, the inventive faculty of which they possess the germs. 176 178

In addition to all this a second factor is noticeable in the course of human development, and this, while all in favour of the Indo-European races, accentuates still more forcibly the differences between the several branches of the human family. Through the centuries the Egyptian hieroglyphs slowly evolved into ideographic signs, which eventually gave place to the phonetic alphabet of the Phoenicians. This *alphabet* goes forth to conquer the world, and to give a fresh aspect to things in general. These twenty to thirty letters of which the Blacks had not the slightest notion, these signs, thanks to which stone, wood and paper have been made to speak, will henceforward allow great minds to transmit their thoughts direct to their fellow-men. The knowledge of one epoch will then be passed on intact to following generations,

719 821 843 783 women to the river to throw away the contaminated earth, order them to make a ball of that earth, and to bring it back to us in the early morning. We grind it, we put it into a pot where it must remain for five days, and then we prepare the great drug to sprinkle the land. The medicine is put into ozen horns and they go to all the drifts, to the boundaries of the country, on the borders of the Nwebeti and of the Thabina rivers, on the road to Sibila's country, to Diskop (Leydsdorp); they must not however cross rivers. Our neighbours do the same on their own side. One of the girls digs the earth, the others dip a stick into the horn and sprinkle the drug into the hole. We also sprinkle the road on which these women have trodden, when they had their blood; we remove the misfortune caused by these women on the roads. The country is pure again. Rain can fall."

This is the purifying rite in the Nkuna clan. Mankhelu asserts that the Pedis do the same. He did not know if the custom existed amongst other Thonga clans. But Viguet described the same custom to me as being in force on the borders of the Limpopo, under the name of *mbelele*. The bones having revealed that the country is impure, the chief orders the mbelele: it is a period of mourning (nkosi) for the land. First the *phokolo*, or sacrifice of the black victim is performed (See Part VI). Then the women assemble. They must remove all their clothing, only putting some grass round their loins and, with a peculiar skipping step, singing a special song: "Mpfula nana" — "rain fall," — they go to all the spots where children prematurely born have been buried in dry ground, on the hills, take away what they find in the broken pots and collect all that impure matter in a secret place, so that children may see nothing of what they are doing. Water is poured on these graves in order to "quench them (timula)." On the evening of the same day they go and bury these impurities; this is done in the mud, near the river. No man must approach during this operation: the women would have the right to strike the imprudent one and ask him questions on the obscene formulae of circumcision; the man would answer in the most impure words he could find, as all language taboos are suspended on that day; nakedness even is no longer taboo, "because," says Viguet,

[813 831]

"it is the law of the country!" Every one consents to the suspension of the ordinary laws! (1)

Amongst the Rongas, I did not hear of any connection between prematurely born children and rain. When the mbelele rite is performed, a mother of twins must lead the procession of women who draw water and pour it on the graves of the twins in order to secure the rain. They also clean all the wells (kuha tinhlobo), digging them afresh and removing any filth in the water. It may be that the corpse of a twin, if it has been buried in dry ground, will be dug out of its grave and buried again near the river, or they will go in procession and pour water on the grave. This will influence Heaven, which is killing the earth by the terrible heat of the sun. The burning October winds will cease and the rain will fall.

There is something mysterious about all these customs. Considered merely as ideas regarding Nature and natural phenomena, I believe their essential meaning to be this : — there are some cases of human birth which are taboo. While any birth is taboo, owing to the lochia, that of children prematurely born is doubly dangerous. Abnormal children, such as twins, children who have died before the "boha puri" rite (I. p. 56), in some clans also children who cut their upper teeth first, share this noxious character. They are a calamity for the whole land as they are connected with the mysterious power of Heaven, and so prevent the rain from falling. The great remedy for the evil, the only means of counteracting this influence, is to bury these children in wet ground. Should this not have been done, the chief must order these little corpses to be exhumed and buried near the river : this is the aim and object of the mbelele. If wet, these graves will cause no harm (2).

How did these extraordinary conceptions first originate ?

(1) This rite of *mbelele* shows striking analogies with the Passage rites which we have already often met with in Thonga customs. This is a special period, a mourning period for the land, says Vignat, a marginal period which, as such, is accompanied by obscene manifestations, both in speech and in absence of clothing.

(2) In the Maluleke clan, as previously mentioned, those three categories of children must be *cremated*, and foreigners dying in the midst of the clan are also burnt after their death, from fear that they might belong to one of these categories and so prevent the rain from falling, if they were buried in dry ground. The mbelele rite there is called *nkulenkyele*. Rangano describes it as follows : — Women collect the bones of twins,

What is the connection between abnormal births of human beings and the rain-fall? I think it can be found in the conception of Heaven which has inspired so many curious rites, and which I shall explain in the next chapter. So it is possible that, after all, the mbelele rite has a religious idea at its base.

b) *Rain charms.*

The removal of the corpses of abnormal children from dry ground and their burial near the river probably sometimes proves ineffective to produce rain. So Bantu magicians have invented a great many charms to obtain the greatly desired showers, and the power of the rain-makers is enormous. Our tribe does not seem to have developed this art as much as others. The Sutho-Pedis are masters in this domain and Mankhelu, who had been taught by them and had become a great and renowned rain-maker, revealed all his secrets to me. He possessed the drug and used it frequently, he said, having often been called in by Sutho chiefs dwelling in far distant districts, as far off as Pretoria. He assured me that he had met with so much success that these chiefs had given him oxen, horses, a waggon, precious beads, etc.! Where had he found this marvellous drug? At Rivimbi (in Venda : Luvimbi), a country north of Spelonken, not far from the Limpopo and to which he went, as far as I could make out, in 1865 or 1866. The Luvimbi people are the descendants of Luvimbi, (1) a chief of the old times (as old as Nkuna, says Mankhelu) who, after his death, went to heaven and became king of heaven ; he still exists there as a spirit, hearing and knowing everything that is done on earth. This Luvimbi is probably the same whom the Vendas call the first man, and concerning whom they have a number of traditions which I shall mention a little later.

and those of still-born children or those who died at birth ; to these they add their old rags (perhaps the cloths used for their menses?) ; they bring all these impurities to the cross-ways and *burn them* there, singing impure songs, saying : "To-day is a great day! There is no taboo any more! If you prohibit anything, it will be an insult to the rain; it will not fall." The smoke of all that they have burnt constitutes a religious offering : now the country will be pure and the rain will fall. The conception prevailing among the Maluleke is somewhat different from that of the Rongas.

(1) I have published an account of the Venda traditions connected with Luvimbi or Raluvimbi in *The S. A Journal of Science*, April 1921, where more details will be found concerning this personage.

2: Junod M-5 (1895-1909) 1927 Thonga

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CHAPTER IV

Taboo and Morality.

If we take the trouble to make a careful study of the life of so-called savages, we very soon notice that, instead of being free from all law and restraint, as superficial observers believe, their life is, on the contrary, subject to a great number of rules and prohibitions, by which primitive man is held captive in the bonds of custom and tradition. These prohibitions are of two principal kinds. Those which are most obvious are *the taboos*, which we have met with on each page of these two volumes. They play an immense part in the behaviour of the raw Native. But, in addition to these, there are other restraints which seem to spring from a totally different set of ideas, *the moral principles*. The relation between the taboo and moral notions is very difficult to determine. It is at the present time one of the most debated questions of Anthropology ; I shall try to show what the state of things is in that phase of human development to which the Thongas of South Africa have attained.

A. THE TABOO.

I ventured to give a provisional definition of the *yila*, or *taboo*, of the Thongas, when we met with the first interdiction of this type, Vol. I. page 37 : "Any object, act, or person that implies a danger for the individual or for the community, and that must consequently be avoided, this object, act or person being under a kind of ban." After explaining hundreds of taboos, I do not feel that this definition needs any alteration. Its main element is this :

3) How are taboos *dealt with?* 784

Happily the danger of taboos can be removed, otherwise life would be almost impossible! The medicine-men have the necessary drugs to protect their poor fellow-men against the misfortune (khombo) which is always threatening them! Is not the whole arsenal of magic at their disposal? Rites in great numbers provide the necessary protection, especially the *luma rite*, which is the proper method of avoiding the special dangers connected with the *first use* of anything. The wish to obtain protection against all these dangers explains the immenre influence of the medicine-men, of those who know the preventive drugs to be used against defilement and misfortune. 789

It is impossible to attain to a true knowledge of the taboos without studying the laws of *their suspension*. Taboos are sometimes suspended. The chief, for instance, is above them, at any rate above some of them, being himself a magical being, a tabooed personage (I. p. 382). The collectivity has a still greater power over them and can cancel them. There are times when all these prohibitions, or at least some of them, are withdrawn; these are the marginal periods, when we behold the strange spectacle that ordinary taboos are suspended (language taboos, relatives-in-law taboos), whilst others are enforced (sexual taboos). I have often drawn attention to this curious phenomenon. 784

B. MORAL RESTRAINTS.

But taboos are not the only kind of restraint to which primitive Bantus submit themselves. The following statements have been collected from old or young informants who were urged to express their inner feelings on this question : 183 604

1) The maternal uncle must provide the ntehe for the first child of his sister. However this is not *yila*, it is a *nau*, a law, and if it is transgressed no direct harm will follow. (I. p. 46.)

2) Men and women do not bathe in the same spot in the lake of Rikatla. Why? Not on account of a yila, but on account of 183 834

183 *shitshabo*, viz., fear, or respect (1). There is no danger in
834 transgressing this law of decency, but to do so is condemned.

3) When a young man has transgressed the taboo of *matlulana* (I. p. 197), having had sexual relations with the same woman as another man, he is not allowed to attend the burial of his rival. It is a taboo. However, if the deceased is his own father, the culprit can be treated with drugs, and so fulfil his duty of grave-digger, being protected against the dangers of his condition : "The *yila* has been removed, but the *biha* remains." *Biha* means that which is bad.

183 So there are three domains, besides the yila, in which the
577 Native is conscious of the restraints imposed upon him : law or custom, respect or decency, and duty or *fanelo*. To these might be added a fourth, the disgust for a certain food (p. 83). The great difference between the taboo and the other prohibitions is that the transgression of the latter is not necessarily attended with danger (2).

Let us consider more closely the idea of *fanelo*, or duty.

192 Fanelo comes from *ku fana*, to be alike ; fanela is what is
183 seemly, becoming. This is not as yet a very high notion of
577 morality. The moral sense, however, certainly exists and this is proved by three facts :

1) The richness of the vocabulary expressive of moral ideas. There are more words applicable to the negative side of the idea and signifying *bad*, than to the positive, signifying *good* ; a phenomenon which may be observed in most primitive languages, even in our French patois. *Ku biha* means to be bad, morally speaking, and to be ugly, esthetically speaking. The distinctiveness of the two domains exists, however, in the mind of the Native. He says : "behile mbilu" — "is bad in his heart," or "behile liso" — "is ugly as regards his face." *Shibi*, the derivative noun of the verb ku

(1) I have heard the mixed bathing of men and women also called a yila, but it is a special kind of yila, *the yila of tshabisa*, the taboo of respect or decency.

(2) I would not, however, insist too strongly on the distinctiveness of these five domains. Theft and murder are prohibited on account of *duty*, but they become taboo if the culprit is discovered, because they will bring punishment upon him. The moral wrong of these acts was perceived *before* their dangerous character, and we have here an instance of a taboo grafted on a moral, or social, prohibition.

biha, is regularly used in Djonga to mean *sin*. It also designates the offensive substance which a child or careless person may have left on the path, instead of observing the sanitary regulations of Native villages. (I. p. 311.) But in addition to biha we have *dyoha* (Dj.), *doha* (Ro.), to commit a wrong, *hona* (Ro.), *onha* (Dj.), which means to spoil, but also to sin, and from which comes *shihono*, the true word for sin in Ronga. *Somboloka* means to be irremediably bad, crooked, like a stem which cannot be straightened.

On the contrary the adjective *nene*, corresponding to biha, contains three meanings: good, nice, and true, the derivate *bunene* designating rather goodness and beauty, and another derivative, *psinene*, truth; the verb used for to be good is *shonga* (Ro), or *saseka* (Dj.), and has both the moral and esthetic significance. *Ku lulama* is to be straight, like a stem, and the use of this word indicates a deep and clear sense of right doing. Many other expressions might be quoted, showing that the notion of moral good and evil is certainly present in the Native mind, quite independently of that of taboo. They also recognise the *conscience* (timpfalu), seated in the diaphragm (p. 361).

2) *Intercourse with Natives* proves the same thing. Though their ideas may differ from ours as regards what is good (1), they are undoubtedly moral beings, with a more or lees developed conscience.

3) Their *folklore* is the best and most objective proof that this is so. Vice is punished and virtue rewarded in all the tales which I have called *moral*, and they certainly contain a whole code of natural and elementary morality (p. 222). The pangs of conscience in a criminal are depicted in a wonderful fashion in Zili, for instance.

However, it must be confessed that this morality is low, that it does not possess a very strong hold on the Native soul, and that the imperative of conscience is by no means the categorical

(1) The idea of charity is particularly low: charity is due only to relatives, or to clansmen, and not to foreigners. I remember a man of the Manyisa clan who nearly died near the lake of Rikatla, having been hurt when working on the railway; nobody took pity on him, because he belonged to another clan. He was saved by a converted woman, Lois, who had a wonderful understanding of the new principles of universal brotherhood.

imperative of Kant. If you can steal without being caught, you may steal! Such is the advice generally given. To tell lies is mere play, which few people take seriously, especially if the lies are not intended to do harm to your fellow-men. There is a great laxity in Native morals (1). Why is this? I am convinced that this weakness of the moral sense is due to the fact that the moral law is not regarded as having been proclaimed by a personal, transcendental God. No relation is established between duty and the divinity. Religion is non-moral ; the ancestor-gods themselves are non-moral. The absolute character of the moral law can only spring from the absolute character of a God who has established it. For the Bantu the law, *nau*, is the *interest of the clan*. Theft is bad because it ruins individual property, and it is necessary to respect property, otherwise collective life becomes impossible. So theft, blows, insults, murder, and witchcraft are condemned and punished, because these actions endanger society and its recognised modes of life. But if society is not aware of it, you may steal ; you are not guilty ; no one has been offended! This principle gives to the morality of Natives a very curious *legal character*, which White people are sometimes slow to understand. A man is not guilty if he has not been convicted of his fault by a regular judicial pronouncement. He does not even feel himself guilty. But if his sin is proved, he at once gives up all subterfuge (Compare Zidji, p. 206) (2). We thus come to this conclusion : if the great

(1) Let me observe, however, that the domain of morality is also the domain of liberty ; and where there is liberty there are also individual differences. This is certainly the case amongst South African Bantus as regards their moral conduct. Any European having Native servants under his direction will have noticed that some of them show real moral qualities, faithfulness, disinterestedness, straightforwardness, respect, even a capacity for self-sacrifice, whilst others are unmitigated liars and thieves and addicted to vices which endanger the welfare and the purity of the home. Even in the Native village such differences are met with. I knew, for instance, a young man who never adopted the gangisa custom, which almost every boy looks on as the legitimate amusement of his age (I. p. 97) ; something told him that it was not right, and he kept away from the girls.

(2) This tendency of the Bantu mind to consider as right and good any decision which has been taken by the group, irrespective of its real moral value, also accounts for a fact which those who have to deal with pupils of African Native Institutions have frequently observed. It may happen that the Principal of the Institution will voice an opinion, give an order or propose a measure which does not please the Native students, and opposition will manifest itself amongst the group. Some of the more obstinate

fault of Bantu religion is that it is non-moral, that of Bantu morality is that it is non-religious. No supreme legislator has ordained it. Hence the want of the idea of the absolute in the dictates of the Bantu conscience. 577 183

Nevertheless, the rudiments of morality are present in the Thonga conscience, the feeling of duty, the sense of right and wrong, and these are independent of the essentially self-interested idea of taboo.

C. RELATION BETWEEN TABOO, SACREDNESS AND MORALITY.

Some modern Ethnographers see in the taboo idea the origin of that of the sacred, and of morality. Amongst South African Bantus, the idea of sacredness is not a prominent one. It may be said that the person of the chief is sacred to them, being set apart; the law of hierarchy, the right of precedence belonging to the elder brother is also sacred, and this conception is very closely allied to that of taboo, though it does not necessarily contain the idea of danger. But if sacredness has been in certain cases a natural development of taboo, I do not think this is the case with moral ideas. 784 577 183

In some cases, morality distinctly preceded taboo; speaking of theft, we have just seen the taboo conception grafted on to a

succeed in persuading their comrades to a unanimous refusal of obedience, and as soon as they feel themselves thus agreed they will oppose their Principal apparently with a good conscience, despite his most persuasive arguments and all the patience that he may display. Morally speaking, they are clearly wrong; religiously also; the principles which they have themselves adopted indubitably condemn them. Yet they will maintain their resistance as long as they can face their master with a united front. But if the Principal is clever enough to take one or two of them — the most sensible — apart, and convince them, then the charm is broken. Feeling themselves divided, the pupils at once come to the conclusion that they are wrong, and they readily submit to the will of their superior. Such events may take place in other colleges, and amongst other races, I am afraid, but the difference is that amongst Bantus, just emerging from the state of collectivism, where morality depended not on the laws of a clearly conceived, holy God, but on the will of the community, the feeling of being right or wrong is above all determined by the attitude of the group. (See my paper on The Magic Conception of Nature amongst Bantus. *South African Journal of Science*. Nov. 1920).

784 577 183 primitive moral idea ; we have also met with a taboo evolving from a notion of disgust (nyenya) (p. 83) ; or of decency (p. 580). I do not assert that it could be proved that the moral restriction in all cases preceded the taboo prohibition. There is on the other hand no ground for asserting that the moral ideas are a natural development of original taboos ; these two sets of ideas seem to be parallel in the domain of conduct, just as Ancestrolatry and the idea of an All-Father are in religion.